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AUTHOR Martini, Mary
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ABSTRACT

This research describes an observation study of 100 children, ages 9-13 years, on the island of 'Ua Pou, Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia. The children were in a French government boarding school in the main valley of the island. Complex, sophisticated group processes among the Marquesan children were observed. The role structures of the group are explained and roles are seen to fit together to produce coordinated group action. The process of starting a large group game is used to illustrate the points of group dynamics. Marquesan peer dynamics are found to differ greatly from the interpersonal dynamics children come in contact with in their formal French schooling. Polynesian children have been found to spend much time together in unsupervised peer groups. They also teach each other major lessons about how to get along with others. (EH)

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Peer Dynamics Among Marquesan School-Aged Children

Mary Martini

Department of Human Resources

University of Hawaii at Manoa

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C. Author's address: Mary Martini, Department of Human Resources, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2515 Campus Rd., Honolulu, HI, 96822 (808) 956-2249.

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Peer dynamics among Marquesan school-aged children

Polynesian children spend much time together in unsupervised peer groups. They teach each other major lessons about how to get along with others. Some ethnographers (Levy 1973; Ritchie and Ritchie 1979) suggest that extensive peer contact may produce shallow, mechanistic or simplistic beliefs about how to relate to others. In this paper I describe complex, sophisticated group processes observed among Marquesan children. I describe the role structures of their groups and show how roles fit together to produce coordinated group action. Then I describe the process of starting a large group game, which illustrates these points.

Marquesan peer dynamics are found to differ greatly from the interpersonal dynamics children come in contact with in their formal French schooling. The possible effects on school success of these different ways to interact with adults are reviewed.

Background

For several months, I observed a group of 100 children, ages 9-13, on the island of 'Ua Pou, Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia. The children lived together at the French government boarding school in the main valley of the island. They came from

five smaller valleys and spent 9 months of the year for 6 years of their childhood in this peer group.

The children lived in dormitories in same sex groups of 50, supervised by only one adult. They were self-sufficient and organized themselves well. They organized activities, settled disputes, distributed food and goods and comforted each other. In particular, they coordinated large group games, involving 30-50 players, very quickly and with little apparent negotiation. My initial aim was to figure out how they did this, since this process reflected how individuals coordinated their actions to be part of the group.

At first, initiations of large group games looked like this to me:

- Some boys start yelling 'keu pari' (prisoners game).
- A large boy goes to one end of the field.
- Another large boy goes to the other end.
- Fifteen to 20 children go to each end.
- The large boys eliminate a few players on each team and the game begins.

After observing this many times, it became clear that children played specific roles in the process, and that teams consisted of clusters of children from the same valleys. To

determine what the roles were and how they fit together, I analyzed the interaction tendencies of 30 of the children. I determined the set of children each child interacted with and the ways in which s/he interacted. I asked how children initiated contact with various others and how they reacted to others' initiations.

Three roles or interaction profiles emerged which I labeled: A - Pushy leaders; A' - Quiet leaders, and B - Quiet followers. Profiles differed in terms of how much a child performed social control vs. social cohesion actions. Social control actions included: bullying, punishing, insulting, threatening, lecturing, showing disgust, commanding, directing, inviting, requesting, and suggesting. Social cohesion actions included: helping, comforting, greeting, grooming, sharing food, joining, imitating, and following.

Examples of profiles of pushy leaders and quiet followers are presented in Table 1. Leaders performed significantly more social control actions than did followers. Followers performed significantly more social cohesion actions than did leaders.

In this system, pushy leaders specialize in social control. They command, direct, bully and scold others. They provide direction for the group and keep members on track. They interact frequently, with a large number of children from both within and outside their own valley group. They negotiate ties with out-

siders and filter information into the group. They provide direction for the group, but are less active in facilitating positive social cohesion. They help, support and share with children less frequently than do quiet leaders and followers.

A′ children are quiet leaders. They come up with ideas for group activity, but quietly suggest these rather than force them on others. Vocal leaders take up their ideas and announce them to the group. Quiet leaders are watched, imitated and followed as much as pushy leaders, but their following is voluntary rather than coerced. Quiet leaders also help, support, share with, and comfort others, providing positive, internal cohesion for the group.

B children are followers. They spend most of their time watching, imitating, following and joining in. By cooperating, they solidify the group.

Group dynamics

These roles fit together to form a system of checks, balances and complementary functions. This system is presented in Figure 1. Pushy leaders (A children) announce the direction for group activity and lead and channel children into it.

Quiet leaders (A′ children) provide the initial ideas for play and keep children involved in group process by helping and supporting them. They serve as a check on the aggressiveness of pushy leaders. They scold them when they become too brazen.

Followers (B children) assure group cohesion. They watch vocal and quiet leaders to see what to do. They quickly fall into place in familiar group activities. They know the routines of games from past experience. They quietly follow these. Followers hold each other to the rules by scolding transgressions. They hold each other to the routines and accepted forms by mocking and laughing at mistakes. They also keep the vocal leaders in check by refusing to obey commands.

Inventive, directive, cooperative and corrective roles fit together in this group to produce coordinated activity.

Description of film segments

I would like to show a film which illustrates how children in these roles work together to coordinate large group activities. In these three segments, children set up activities involving 25-35 players in less than three minutes each. In the first segment they initiate a frequently played "prisoner game," called 'keu pari'.

The second segment illustrates how rules and routines are maintained once established. Children use stereotyped threat gestures to hold each other to the rules.

In the third segment a quiet leader invents a new game. Children watch him for cues as to what to do. They cooperate as soon as they know what to do.

The segments illustrate how the boys organize activities, how they keep them moving, and how they introduce change into routines.

Segment 1: Prisoners game

In 'keu pari' two teams line up at opposite ends of the field. Players try to cross the opposing team's home line. If a child is tagged before crossing the line, s/he is thrown into prison. Prisoners are guarded by the largest and/or fastest player from the opposing team. Prisoners form a chain by holding hands. They are freed when a team member runs up and tags the first person in the chain. The liberator risks getting caught him or herself. Winning consists of having all members cross the enemy line before all members of the opposing team have crossed your line.

In this segment, boys organize 'keu pari' in the school yard at the close of school. Quiet leaders and followers initiate a call for 'keu pari.' This is barely heard. Three pushy leaders, however, take up the call and position themselves at opposite ends of the field. Boys from their valleys cluster around them to form teams.

They negotiate only to even up the sides. One vocal leader tries to order a follower boy to join his side. His commands, however, are too pushy. The boy ignores him, and others scold him for his pushiness. The boy waits for conflict to die down

and then voluntarily quits. The game begins. It takes only two and half minutes to coordinate the 30 boys.

Specifically, these events occur:

1) Three quiet leaders from valleys 1 and 3 call 'keu pari.' They look at vocal leaders from their valleys who are sitting on the school steps. They point to the far end of the field where they want their team to group.

2) Two pushy leaders from valley 1 and valley 4 stand up, take up the call and run to the seaward end of the field. They call to friends to join them.

3) Pushy leaders, quiet leaders and followers from valleys 2 and 3 gather at the upland end of the field. They prepare for play and wait for other valley members to join them.

4) Samu, a pushy leader from valley 2, takes the role of prison-guard on the upland team. He goes to the seaward team and tells Kasto, a valley 4 follower, to go to his team. He points up the field and yells at him. Kasto looks down and moves away, but makes no move to leave.

5) Sive, a pushy leader from valley 1, defends Kasto. He pushes Samu toward the upland end of the field. Samu

stands up to Sive's treats and stares him down. Sive backs off and brings his hand to his eyes, a gesture of submission. He looks down and moves away, but does not leave.

6) Samu turns his attention to Sake, a follower from valley 2. He orders him to go to the upland team. Sake turns away and ignores the command.

Children repeatedly ignore bossy commands. Bossing is not accepted by the group as a whole. Children know that others will support them if they refuse to be bossed around. Threats rarely turn into attacks.

Pushy leaders boss frequently. Bossing seem to be tolerated and even encouraged as a dramatic overstatement of what the leader wants. Children often wait until the display is finished and then volunteer to do what was asked. Marquesan children imply that no person has the right to tell another what to do. Requests which are necessary for group coordination often take this overblown form.

Samu continues to try to eliminate children. As this point the first boy voluntarily drops out. His friend joins him. They sit on a bench to watch. The friend leans on him and begins to search through his hair for lice. He seems to be comforting him.

The game begins, with teams of 15 players. The seaward team consists of 5 boys from valley 1; 5 from valley 4; 3 from valley

5 and 2 from valley 3. The upland team consists of 7 boys from valley 2; 6 from valley 3; and 2 from valley 5. Children have joined teams in same-valley clusters.

Later in this segment, several players from the seaward team have been captured. The prisoners form a chain. They yell to team members to free them. They are guarded by Samu, the pushy leader from valley 2.

Sake, a follower from valley 2, tries to free them, but is caught. Two prisoners argue that he was not properly tagged. They perform a stereotyped threat gesture. They crouch, point and yell at him. The captor persists and Sake is imprisoned. The technique of waiting out the angry display is applied in this case as well.

Teahu, a pushy leader from valley 1, runs up to free the prisoners. They scatter and run past the enemy line, winning the game. They return to their territory, chanting "Vive la poulet". (This is an in-group modification of a phrase they heard in a French movie, and has some significance for the group.)

Segment 2: Stereotyped threat gestures

Children hold each other to the rules by dramatically marking perceived violations. In a second game of 'keu pari', Samu, the pushy leader from valley 2, argues with Pierre, a quiet leader from valley 1. He sends Pierre back to his home-line with emphatic threat gestures.

Maricere, a follower from valley 2, tags Kaihi, a follower from the same valley. He does so very roughly. Kaihi gets angry, picks up stones, and begins to cry. Maricere approaches and seems about to apologize. But Kaihi yells at him. Maricere looks at him in disgust, says he is a baby and turns away. Kaihi hurls the stones. The stones miss, as is almost always the case. Children stop to stare at this relatively rare transition from threat to attack. Maricere ignores the attack and Kaihi returns to play.

Segment 3: Inventing a game

In this segment a boy invents a game and persuades others to help him build an obstacle course and run through it. Ato, a quiet leader from valley 3, sets up a course of driftwood logs, stakes and other beach rubble. He models this after an obstacle course he had seen in a war movie a few weeks earlier. He sets up part of the course and runs through it alone.

Atansi, a vocal leader from valley 2, notices him and joins in. Uma and Eroi, vocal leaders from valley 3, join in. Edmond, a quiet leader from valley 1, joins in. Smaller, follower boys from each of these valleys join their leaders until many children run through the course.

One part of the course is difficult: leaping over a large post. It separates the older from the younger boys. Only vocal

and quiet leaders try this jump. Children laugh at themselves when they fail.

Quiet leaders tend to be innovators. Vocal leaders notice these innovations and announce them to the group. A large group activity coalesces only if a vocal leader shows interest.

Conclusion

Marquesan children organize themselves in elaborate, complex ways. Inventive, directive, supportive and cooperative roles complement each other to produce smooth group coordination. The authoritarian pyramid structure typical of Anglo-American play, in which leaders boss underlings, is absent.

In American play, peer leaders take the roles of team captains. They choose members one by one moving from the best to the worst players. A child's position in the dominance hierarchy is signaled by how quickly he gets picked. Individual competition for a high position in the hierarchy is not a salient dynamic in Marquesan peer play.

Pushy leaders exist in Marquesan groups, but they serve a delimited function. They are held in check by group pressure. Excesses of power do not arise.

Quiet leaders form the backbone of peer groups. Quiet leaders provide direction for the group, by suggesting new activities. They also provide internal cohesion, by helping and

comforting members. They coordinate with pushy leaders to initiate group play.

Marquesan children act within cohesive networks of complementary roles. Children rarely stand alone. Nor do they compete among themselves as individuals seeking status. The children attend French school, in which Western ideals of individualism and dynamics of authority are emphasized. Marquesan children have quietly refused to assimilate these patterns and beliefs. Marquesan adult society involves complicated networks of roles and obligations. In the broad view, however, it is stubbornly egalitarian. It is interesting to observe the development of these patterns and beliefs among Marquesan school-aged children.

References

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M. Martini
Center for Development of Early Education

TABLE I

SOCIAL ACTIONS CODED IN THIS STUDY AND

THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS PERFORMED THESE ACTIONS *

	TAHIA	ATANASI	MIKE	PIERRE	LEADERS	FOLLOWERS
I. SOCIAL CONTROL ACTIONS						
A. Positive Social Control						
1. Commands/Directs	13	11	2	5	24	7
2. Invites/Requests	1	5		1	6	1
3. Suggests						
4. Nonverbally Models		3		4	3	4
5. Total: Positive Social Control	14	19	2	10	33	12
B. Negative Social Control						
1. Bullies/Punishes	4	9		2	13	2
2. Insults/Threatens		3			3	
3. Lectures						
4. Shows Disgust/ Derision	9	10	6	8	19	14
5. Total: Negative Social Control	13	22	6	10	35	16
C. Total: Social Control	27	41	8	20	68	28
II. TRANSMITTING INFORMATION						
A. Announces an event			1	1		
B. Talks about the here & now	7	4	3		11	5
C. Talks about past, furture, distant or imagined events	9		1		9	1
D. Total: Transmits Information	16	4	5	1	20	6
II. SOCIAL COHESION ACTIONS						
A. Active Prosocial Behaviors (Gives food or objects, helps, comforts, greets, grooms...)	6	4	4	8	10	12
B. Passive Prosocial Behaviors (Joins, watches, follows, goes along with, imitates...)	7	9	24	26	16	50
C. Total: Social Cohesion Actions	13	13	28	34	26	62

* based on 12, 5-minute behavior records per child.

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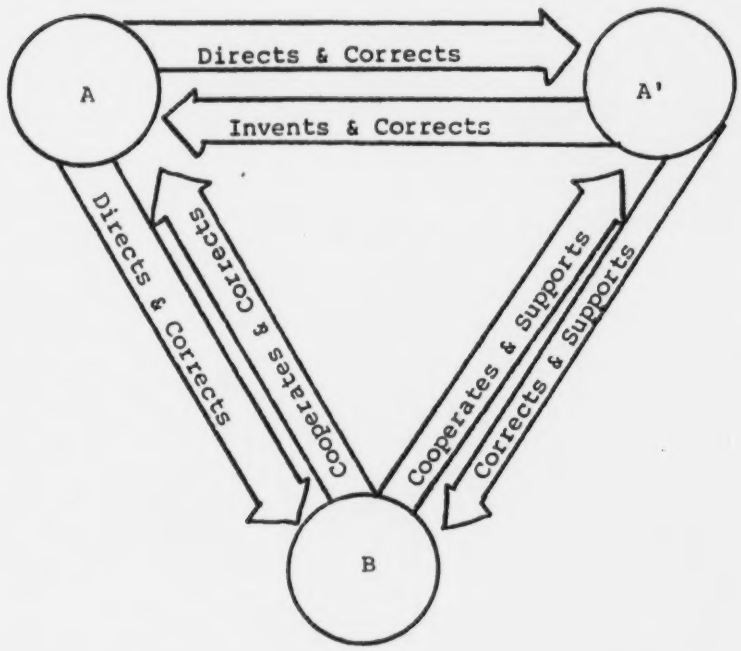
FIGURE 1. Interaction Profiles and Group Dynamics of Marguesan children.



A profile: Vocal leaders

1. Interacts frequently, with many
2. Commands & directs a lot
3. Bullies & scolds a lot
4. Supports little
5. Is watched, followed

A' profile: Quiet leader

1. Interacts less frequently
2. Suggests & models frequently
3. Corrects rarely (Usually A children)
4. Supports B's
5. Is watched, followed

B profile: Quiet follower

1. Initiates few contacts
2. Little positive social control
3. Little negative social control
4. Passively supports solidarity by cooperating
5. Watches & follows

M.Martini
Center for the Development of Early Education

Abbreviations

HH, HHT, HM, HT, HAA are abbreviations for the 5 valleys from which the children come.

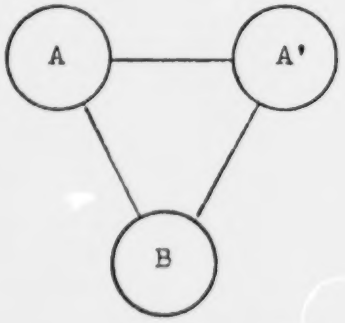
A children are forceful, vociferous leaders who command and bully others. They serve as negotiators between the group and outsiders.

A' children are quiet leaders who model new activities. They provide direction and social cohesion for the group. They rarely command, bully, or serve as negotiators with outsiders.

B children are followers who watch, imitate, and go along with others' activities.

A and A' children reflect different styles of leadership. B children are competent in most group activities, but tend to be younger than A level children.

These roles make up a V-shaped dominance hierarchy as diagrammed below.



Description of Film

In the two film segments, children set up activities which involve more than 25 children, in less than 3 minutes. In the first, they initiate a conventional "prisoner" game [keu pari]. Children already understand the procedures of 'keu pari.' Once it is set up, they carry out its routines. In the second segment, a child initiates a novel activity. Children need to watch for cues as to what to do next. The film segments illustrate how the boys organize large group activities, how they keep these flowing smoothly, and how they introduce change in routines.

M.Martini
Center for the Development of Early Education

Prisoners Game

In 'keu pari' two teams of 15 each, line up at opposite ends of a field. Players try to cross the opposing team's home line. If a child is tagged before crossing the line, s/he is thrown into prison. Prisoners are guarded by the largest and/or fastest player from the opposing team. Prisoners form a chain by holding hands. They are freed when a team member tags the first person in the chain. Winning consists of having all members of the team cross the enemy line first.

The boys set up 'keu pari' in this way:

1) Three boys (level B) from HH and HM call 'keu pari' [prisoners game]. They look at A-level boys from their valleys who are sitting on the school steps. They point to the far end of the field where they want the game set up.

2) Two A-level boys from HH (Sive) and HT (So) take up the call and run to the seawards end of the field. They call to friends to join them.

3) A-, A'- and B-level boys from HM and HHT gather at the upland end of the field (Eroi, Roger, Pierre, Uma). They prepare for play and wait for other valley members to join them.

4) Samu, an A-level boy from HHT, is to be prison-guard on the upland team. He goes to the seawards team and tells Kasto, (B, HT) to go to the upland team. Kasto looks and moves away, but makes no move to leave. Samu yells that the team is too large.

5) Sive (A, HH) pushes Samu toward the other team. Samu resists, body-blocks Sive, and orders him to go upland.

6) Sive backs off and brings his hand to his eyes--in a gesture ofsubmission. He moves and looks away, but does not leave.

7) Samu turns his attention to Sake (B, HHT), pointing for him to leave. Sake turns away and ignores the command.

8) Samu continues to try to eliminate a child. Kasto eventually drops out. He watches from a bench, while Pierre (B, HM) delouses him.

9) Final teams have 15 players. The seawards team consists of 5 boys from HH; 5 from HT; 2 from HAA; and 2 from HM. The upland team consists of 7 boys from HHT; 6 from HM and 2 from HAA. Children have joined the game in same-valley clusters.

Later, several players from the seawards team have been

captured. The prisoners form a chain. They yell to team members to free them. They are guarded by Samu (A, HHT). Sake (B, HHT) tries to free them, but is caught. Two prisoners argue that he was not properly tagged. They perform a stereotyped threat gesture of crouching, pointing with one hand and yelling. The captor persists and Sake is emprisoned.

Teahu (A level, HH) frees the prisoners. They scatter and run past the enemy line, winning the game. They return to their territory, chanting "Vive la poulet" [Long live the chicken] (This is an elaboration of a line from a French movie they saw a week earlier).

In a game the next day, Samu (A, HHT) argues with Pierre (A', HH). He sends him back to his home-line, with emphatic threat gestures. Maricere (B, HT) tags Kaihi (B, HT) too roughly. Kaihi picks up stones to throw, and begins to cry. Maricere approaches --possibly to apologize--but Kaihi yells at him. Maricere gives him a disparaging look, and implies he is a baby for crying. Kaihi throws the stones.

Obstacle course

In this second segment, boys set up and run through an obstacle course. Ato (A', HM) sets up the course. He seems to model it after an obstacle course he saw in a war movie. He runs through the course alone. Atanasi (A, HHT) sees him and joins in. Uma and Eroi (A, HM) join in. Ed (A', HH) joins in. Smaller boys from each of these valleys join their leaders, until many boys play.

Activities such as leaping over a large post, separate older from younger boys. Only A and A' level boys try this. Children laugh at themselves when they fail.

A' children introduce innovations. The activity spreads to the whole group only if A children notice and perform the actions. If they do not, the activity dissipates.